



QASIM RAZA

My College Experience Shaped Who I Am Today

By BRITTANIE K. ANDERSON

On a hot, 41-degree day at the end of May, I arrived in New Delhi for a 10-week internship at the U.S. Embassy with little more than some multi-vitamins and a degree from Howard University, one of America's most prestigious HBCUs. That means Historically Black College or University, a concept that is very specific to the history of the United States. Many HBCUs are among America's oldest universities, having grown from the academic deprivation that slavery imposed upon African Americans. There were no higher education institutions for blacks until African American leaders, white abolitionists and religious societies began creating distinguished colleges for them. The first was Cheyney University in Pennsylvania, established in 1837. In 1964, segregated higher education institutions were banned nationwide, although the HBCUs had always been open to all races. There are 107 recognized

Historically Black Colleges and Universities that serve about 228,000 students.

I chose to attend Howard University after visiting two other schools that I had been accepted to—the enormous state university in Illinois with a good sociology program, and Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, an all-women's HBCU. I was already wearing the colors of the University of Illinois, and telling everyone that I was going there, and I only decided to visit Spelman as an afterthought. When I arrived on Spelman's sunny campus, I could feel the legacy of accomplished black women alumni like Alice Walker, one of the foremost contemporary American writers; Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund; and Marcelite J. Harris, the first woman U.S. Air Force brigadier general.

I could envision a bright, successful future unfolding in front of me, a first-generation university student from a low-income family. I

knew that an HBCU was the only choice for me. In the end, Spelman did not offer much financial aid, whereas Howard University offered me a full scholarship. Without ever having visited Howard, or the East Coast, I packed up my things and drove to Washington, D.C. Grateful

Body, Dress & Culture; Black Women in Visual Culture and Intro to African Diaspora. In addition, Africana Studies is tied into every subject, from history to physics to fashion merchandising. Professors emphasize the often disregarded roles that blacks have played in

Predominantly Black Universities

HBCUs are not simply universities or colleges with a majority of black students. Those are Predominantly Black Institutions, or PBIs, which, over the years, because of their location and other factors, have attracted predominantly African American student populations. There are 75 colleges, universities and trade schools recognized as PBIs. More than half of the estimated 265,000 students who attend them are from low-income families or are among the first generation in their families to attend college.

So, an HBCU is always a PBI, but a PBI is not always an HBCU.

simply for the opportunity to study, I didn't realize that I had made quite possibly the best decision of my life.

In addition to classes in one's major field of study, Howard requires students to take at least one course in an Africana cluster, which is a series of courses on issues, theories and developments of black people throughout the United States, Africa and elsewhere. I chose from such life-changing classes as Black

these fields, and constantly relate the subjects to the lives of people of color. Howard students are required to develop a strong historical consciousness, which produces strong leaders of the future.

My professors weren't expected to teach about important historical moments with passive subjectivity, but with passion and pride. They frequently used the word *we* when speaking of issues concerning people of color. This does not create an

For More Information

Howard University's Web site <http://www.howard.edu>
Historically Black Colleges and Universities
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq9511.html>



DR. ANITA NAHAL/Courtesy Howard University

Howard students majoring in dance perform the bhangra during the university's first celebration of Diwali, on November 3, 2005.

exclusive environment, because a Howard education aims to instill in students a sense of humanity and a desire to fight all forms of oppression. Ironically, one of the common criticisms of Howard is that it, allegedly, is not diverse, when it actually has one of the highest international student populations of any university in the United States. There

are no quotas, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity or nationality is strictly prohibited in the admissions process. Though the vast majority of Howard's applicants are African American students, I am proud to have befriended students from India, Brazil, Japan, Cameroon, France and other countries during my time at Howard.

Books available at the American Libraries

The Howard Guide to African-American History (New Delhi)
Howard University: An Architectural Tour (Kolkata)
Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind (New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai)

There is also a long-running history between Howard University and India. Howard Thurman, the dean of Howard University's Rankin Chapel, along with his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, visited India in the mid-1930s. They met with Mohandas K. Gandhi, discussing India's colonial struggle and black Americans' struggle for civil rights. In 1947, Howard University President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson led an African American delegation to India, along with Benjamin Mays, president of another prominent HBCU, Morehouse College of Atlanta, Georgia. When Johnson returned home, he gave a speech in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, spreading what he had learned to other intellectuals and activists. A young man named Martin Luther King, Jr. was in attendance. King, a recent graduate of Morehouse College, was fascinated by the cross-religious, non-violence strategies of Gandhi. King began researching

Gandhi, and a decade later, made his own visit to India. He used Gandhi's tactics of non-violent civil disobedience and religious tolerance to develop strategies for the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and '60s.

Today, Howard University can be distinguished by its renowned Indian faculty, including Dr. Anita Nahal, whose work promotes bonds between African American and Indian women. The university has also developed programs to enhance mutual understanding, such as the Howard University-Jadavpur University Research Initiative, and the U.S.-India Studies Initiative. Combined with an ever-increasing Indian and Indian diaspora student population, Howard University and other HBCUs are cementing their role in today's global society.



Brittanie K. Anderson wrote this article while working as a Public Affairs intern at the American Center, New Delhi.

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Test Scores vs. Reflective Essays: The U.S. University Application

What do you want to do with your life? Why do you want to do it?

These questions, or some variation of them, must be answered to gain admission to most universities in the United States. It's called an admissions essay, and the people who read them look for students with passion, focus and purpose to their studies. And yes, simply saying, "I enjoy studying biology" doesn't cut it.

Yet, Indian students with dreams of studying in the United States manage to write admissions-winning essays every year, with a little help from counselors. "In India the admission is based on the marks the students scored, whereas U.S. universities look at several criteria. Indian students are often unable to understand that, and this is where USEFI advising services come into play," says Vijaya Khandavilli, a just-retired counselor at USEFI.

Students should also consider, not just a university's academic reputation, but its other attributes. For instance, would you like to live in a city or a small town? Are small classes a priority, or are you more interested in participating in sports teams?

For Deepak Goyal, studying at Texas A&M University, it was weather. He had heard about the snowy winters in some parts of America, and knew he did not want to go to school in a cold climate. He zeroed in on Texas as having the right climate, and applied to three schools there.



VIKAS NARULA

USEFI adviser Amita Sharma gives students and parents information on studying in the United States at a U.S. University Fair in New Delhi.

USEFI offers weekly basic orientation programs on U.S. higher education, which are free to the public. USEFI also replies to queries in person, by phone, e-mail and post from six certified advising centers in Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

—S.J.